



Welcome to our December WHAg Mag

- celebrating Yule and finding solace in the Solstice

As we go to press, Christmas as we know it is cancelled for millions and our British Isles are being isolated from even our nearest neighbours as countries close their borders to us. There is no denying that this is a truly difficult time for so many people and so we are taking solace in the Solstice today and making time for a little stillness and reflection.

The Winter Solstice, is of course our shortest day and the signal for growers to get garlic cloves planted up ready for a Spring crop. Read on to learn how to get the best from this incredible plant - healthwise, it's an essential.

Winter on the farm, just like any season, is an important time whether it's keeping electric fence batteries topped up (12v variety) or our ex-batteries protected (feathered-hen variety), or having to think about mud, glorious mud, ever changing tiers, lockdown and lagging, as well as dealing with the looming unknown of **Brexit on food and British farming**. For first hand insight, join John and Joanna for an update of life on Dale Farm in the Peak District and meet 'November' the beautiful Highland calf: [View video here](#). Meanwhile, WHAg farmer Meg Walters shares her recent musings in her latest blog: **'In The Bleak Mid Winter'**

At this time of year we really look forward to the buzz of the Oxford Real Farming Conference, an annual highlight for 'Real Farmers' everywhere, and this year, due to it going online, that literally does mean EVERYWHERE as ORFC goes Global for the first time with the most incredible 7 day programme. [Book Tickets HERE](#)

WHAg has two sessions : Monday Jan 11th at 8pm - A Presentation and Panel featuring vets and farmers from Brazil, NZ, NL and UK: **Alternative Health Approaches to Infectious Livestock Disease - An International Perspective** And also on Tuesday 12th at 8pm - WORKSHOP limited spaces available which you must PREBOOK: **An Exploration of 'Feminine Values' in the Context of Livestock Farming** - Do come and support us.

Another not to be missed event TONIGHT is the return of the CHRISTMAS STAR (possibly) which actually is the **Great Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn** - an event which last happened 800 years ago AND which, if we are lucky enough to be cloud free, can be seen after dark but BEFORE 6.30pm.

Whatever the weather, we shall be out there saluting it and raising a glass to 'that which is greater than us', spinning here on our small blue planet.

Until next year, we wish you good cheer and good health.

The WHAg team



A Celebration of Winter Solstice

John Matthews

"The Solstice is a time of quietude, of firelight, and dreaming, when seeds germinate in the cold earth, and the cold notes of church bells mingle with the chimes of icicles. Rivers are stilled and the land lies waiting beneath a coverlet of snow. We watch the cold sunlight and the bright stars, maybe go for walks in the quiet land. All around us the season seems to reach a standstill
.....a point of repose."

Garlic - the back to front plant!

The old adage "Plant on the shortest day, and harvest on the longest" applies to garlic. Unless garlic gets a decent spell in the ground in cold weather it does not perform the miracle of multiplying up from the one clove planted, into the many faceted bulb we all know, but rather just grows as a single big round clove which has disappointing keeping properties. Now is the time to clear some ground and get those garlic in.

This year mine have gone in after last year's Runner Beans, I've saved my bean seeds for next year and cut the plants off at the base leaving those nitrogen fixings roots in case they will feed my new crop, then I've added some home made compost (thank you Fred, ace compost maker).

If you look carefully at the base of each clove you will see tiny little roots straining to find the soil, just desperate to grow.

I plant mine so that the growing tip is about one inch under the soil because we have such hearty blackbirds that yank them out to look underneath for worms and other goodies, and until the new crop is well established and plugged into the soil I am on daily checking duties to replant any who have stood too high on their tip toes and are in danger of falling over. But once these little stages are complete they are away and I shall be looking forward to 'wet garlic' in the spring.

Meanwhile, my last year's stored garlic, from which I've taken this year's plantings are beginning to lose their freshness and a few are getting a bit fausty. This is the signal to pickle and preserve what I can to complete the loop of homegrown garlic, all year round.

Pammy Riggs



Recipe: Pickled Garlic

This recipe gives you pungent preserved cloves and stores easily for many months. Pickle whole garlic bulbs in their skins: even the tiniest cloves are easy to peel after this treatment, jumping out of their skins into the cooking pot at the merest touch. Create a garlicky snack by mashing a few cloves onto delicious bread and drizzle with olive oil.

Method

1. Remove the main stalks. Place garlic into a bowl of lukewarm water and allow to soak for a few minutes before cutting back the root end to a flat plane and peeling as many of the papery layers off to leave a clean bulb, no need to peel the cloves any further.
2. Have enough sterilised jars to hand and vinegar to cover your garlics.
3. Using a heavy bottomed, non corrosive pan, place in your garlics including any loose cloves with a generous tablespoon of honey and pour over the vinegar.
4. Bring to the boil and simmer for five minutes.
5. With a slotted spoon fill your jars and top up with vinegar to cover the bulbs.
6. Seal, allow to cool and label. After one month these are ready to use.



Garlic for Health

Antiseptic, anti-oxidant, antibacterial, anti-cancer....just some of the therapeutic benefits of garlic mentioned by The Garlic Farm. You can read more about these benefits, plus you'll find tips on growing, cooking, and a really useful garlic calendar on their [website](#)....

Meg's Musings: In The Bleak Mid Winter

Winter on the farm



With the ever-dwindling daylight, progressively colder, bleaker days and frosty nights, it can be hard to motivate yourself to get things done. Daylight is a limiting factor for both mood and motivation at this time of year. However, winter skies at each end of the day occasionally produce some of the most glorious light which brightens the soul. [Read Meg's blog](#)....

"Working outside on a cold, bright day before heading into the warm is also one of the most satisfying sensations in the farming year too, as you really feel you've earned to right to be huddled up indoors."



Yule: Traditions & Symbols

When the days grew colder and the nights grew longer, people of ancient times would light candles and gather round fires to lure back the sun. They would bring out their stores of food and enjoy feasting and festivities.

- **Evergreens** were cut and brought indoors to symbolise life, rebirth and renewal.
- **Holly** leaves, symbolic of the Holly King, represent hope, while the red berries represent potency.
- **Mistletoe** represents the female element, also holds much importance as it was used by Druid priests in special ceremonies during the Winter Solstice.
- **Yule Log** it was believed that the longer the Yule log burned, the faster the sun would come to warm the earth.
- **Bells** were often rung during the Winter Solstice to drive away demons that surfaced during the dark time of the year.
- **Wreaths** were also traditional in ancient times for they symbolized the wheel of the year and the completion of another cycle.
- **Wassail** derives from the Old English words waes hael, which means "be well", "be hale" or "good health". It is a strong drink, usually a mixture of ale, honey and spices or mulled apple cider.

Don't forget to deck your halls with Nature Symbols of Yule: Holly, Oak, Mistletoe, Ivy, Evergreens, Laurel, Bayberry, Blessed Thistle, Frankincense, Pine, Sage, Yellow Cedar.

And of course let's not forget to celebrate the Yule feast with Traditional Food and Drink: Yule Log Cake, Gingerbread, Fruits, Berries, Nuts, Pork dishes, Turkey, Eggnog, Ginger Tea, Spiced Cider, Wassail.

Yule really was a time to EAT, DRINK and BE MERRY.

Finally, we leave you on a more contemplative note:

To Know The Dark

by Wendell Berry

To go in the dark with a light. Is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is travelled by dark feet and dark wings.



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